Castlemaine Naturalist

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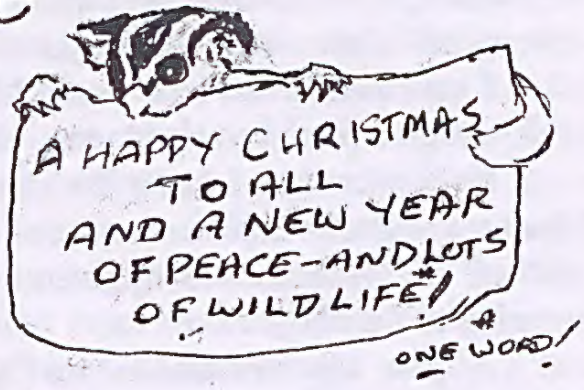

Eagle Voices

Last month in the Observations Margaret Badminton reported hearing and seeing a Little Eagle calling with sharp yelps like a small dog in pain. This sent Chris Morris scurrying for his *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds, Vol. 2,* which is both authoritative and comprehensive, and gives a very full description of the voice and calls of raptors.

It is stated that the voice of the Little Eagle is reasonably well known but no detailed studies had been done, and few recordings available. They are known to be vocal particularly in breeding season during aerial displays and around the nest - "whistles, chatters whines and squeals, some with quality of oboe (Hollands)".

It goes on to give some very full descriptions, including sonograms. The one that caught my eye describes the "Shrill Chatter: very rapid, c. 5 syllables/s (sic.) Given in extreme excitement by female during courtship and delivery of prey; by both sexes in aggression or stress; probably the 'trilling scream' of Fley (1951)."

The other one that interested me was the "Squeal, rarely heard, possibly only by male. Given in aerial advertisement display. Descending and shrill, sometimes followed by three ascending notes." Ed.

61 Hunter Street, Spring 2003

The story this year is that the birds are all hungry, and therefore the larger and more aggressive birds dominate our patch.

The Striated Pardalotes made brave attempts to breed, but were so terrorized by Red Wattlebirds and ravens that they left the nest box area. The same happened with Crimson Rosellas whose attempts to inspect their nest box were frustrated, and they gave up. However they have recently appeared with two young, so obviously they found a spot in the bush behind us. They stroll around on the ground and casually pick off the correa flowers - especially the "Point Hicks" which has very large scarlet blooms. I have overcome that problem with bird netting as the plants are still small.

In late Summer I pruned the *Grevillea rosemarinifolia* back quite severely and it paid off with prolific blooms. The small birds found it a safe

haven because of the density, and for months it has supplied the Eastern Spinebills, New Holland and Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, Silvereyes and the occasional Yellow-tufted Honeyeater, with food and shelter.

I have neither seen nor heard Mistletoebirds for many months but then, the mistletoe produced no blooms, either.

Only once have I had a bronzewing call from "our" patch of bush, and they are scarce in the Vanston Road area this year also. The Rufous Whistler arrived in September to brighten our days, but it is very cautious about coming to the baths.

A pair of Goldfinches are here regularly to drink briefly before disappearing, and small flocks of Yellow-rumped Thornbills join them sometimes.

We were delighted to see a small flock of Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos pass over us and settle in the bush beyond. A few days later a very large flock appeared, and I think these have been reported by many people around the Kalimna area.

There is nothing to admire about the ravens except their intelligence. They are rearing a pair of young birds again this year, and the small bird bath often contains large crusts of stale bread gathered from around the neighbourhood and left there to soften. On one occasion as I cleaned up the disgusting soup from the larger bird bath , which they prefer, I dredged up the remains - half eaten - of a very young blackbird, presumably put there to soften up the bones and tough legs for future consumption. As my neighbours' cat controls the Blackbird population very effectively I don't need their help in that regard!

Shirley Parnaby

Birdwatching along the Cairns Waterfront, Aug. '02

(Yes, really! I've apologised to Margaret. Somehow it got into the wrong file, but I felt it was still of interest, especially as Margaret tells me that a boardwalk has now been put across the mudflats. Ed.)

There on the Cairns Waterfront I spent an interesting hour-plus birdwatching amid the busy hub-bub of tourists walking to and fro. The tide was receding and the waterbirds descended on the mud flats. I watched them with excitement because I have not had many chances to observe seaside birds. There were many here that I did not recognise. "They're only Pelicans, love", one old gentleman said as he went past. If only he had stopped and looked a while! In the company of several other bird watchers I spent and enjoyable time. There were migratory birds which had just arrived from the Northern Hemisphere (Curlew Sandpiper, Tattler, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Bar-tailed Godwit) avidly feeding, as well as the other locals; Pelicans, ibis, terns, Masked Lapwings and a Brahminy Kite searching for food. There was also an interesting bird that looked like a lump of mud - a Mangrove Heron.

Margaret Willis

Birdwatching on the Bendigo Sewerage Ponds 15/11/03

Despite the heat there were 11 hardy souls met at Lake Weroona and then continued on to the Bendigo Sewerage Ponds. Chris and John tried to find the track to the bird hide, and actually made their way there, but the track and the *corrugated iron* hide have been neglected, and the rest of the hardy souls proved themselves wimps, including me. Just the same we got a good view of part of the pond where there was a flotilla? armarda? convoy? (we couldn't decide) of about 80 Coots sailing steadily along the far side, with a large flagship in the form of a black swan escorting them. (It's the sun that makes the imagination run wild.) There were, amongst others, a few Hardheads, Grey Teal, Hoary-headed Grebes, a couple of Musk Ducks, Clamorous Reed Warblers, Tree Martins, Welcome Swallows, Noisy Miners feeding young (we only got glimpses, but we could hear them!), plus Eastern Rosellas and Redrumps. Some of the group saw the Swamp Harrier, too.

We moved on to the ponds nearer the treatment works, and added a lone Marsh Tern which stayed sitting on a post in the middle of the water for the whole time we were there, a lot more Hardheads, some Chestnut Teal, Silver Gulls and a couple of Masked Lapwings. Altogether we had a list of 27 different species.

Most of the time we were in the shade of some healthy-looking River Redgums, but we still needed plenty of drinks from our water bottles. The West, the Newhaven trip and the desert seemed to dominate conversations.

Rita Mills

A Map and a Book

Meridian Publications of East Brighton (ph. 9676 8448) recently published a totally new map of the entire Wombat State Forest. It contains an unprecedented degree of detail of the forest. The map went into a second edition within weeks of appearing. I picked up my copy at the Woodend Information Centre for $12.95, but I dare say it is more widely available if you ask around. The same mob re-did the map of the Lerderderg State Park some years ago, too, if you are interested.

Another recent publication which may be of interest to members is the second edition of the standard work *Name That Flower - the identification of flowering plants*, by I Clark and H. Lee (Melbourne University Press. This book, a prescribed text for all botany students, has been around since 1987 but has finally been thoroughly revised and expanded to include South Australian species, rather than being limited to Victorian species like the first edition. This is a book for the specialist or for those aspiring to know more about the structure of plants and how this relates to nomenclature and classification of plants. RRP is $34.95, but you can get it for $31.46 from the Melbourne University Bookroom if you pay cash.

Bruce Donaldson.

Surveys and Surveys

The Club is working on roadside surveys at the moment, reassessing some of the Shire roads. Threatened Species Network have given us a grant, and we are looking in particular for a number of species of plants that are listed by them, as well as interesting roadside vegetation and roadside habitats that are worth preserving. Jenni Collier of TSN and Darren Bos, the Shire Environmental Officer, are coordinators, Jenni doing survey work with the help of CFNC. The grant covers the 15 months until December 2004.

Jenni took the first survey group out to Elphinstone, and that was a steep learning curve for us all, as surveys of this type have never been undertaken before, and into the bargain we have had to learn to use the GPS and how to record data as is required.

Rita Mills has taken out a couple of teams also since then. We have found *Diurus behrii* Golden Cowslips on two roads surveyed, with a wonderful show of Sticky Hopbush and Chocolate lilies as well on one road, and one of the flax lilies listed, *Dianella ssp. affin. longifolia*, on another road.

This is a big and important job for the club, and the more people involved the better. Some of the plants we are looking for are summer and autumn flowering, but there are more that will appear again next Spring and it will be well if we can get a number of teams together then. If Jenni is going out she will notify people on e-mail, Rita can only ring anyone who might be interested (she's determinedly living in the dark ages).

If you would be interested in coming out with us on a roadside survey, please let Jenni Collier or Rita Mills know. We need people to drive, read maps, judge distances, find plants as well as the ones who are good at identifying plants and following keys for identification.

Another team was asked by the Friends of Kalimna to survey the plants on a block that they want left in the Kalimna area of the Heritage Park, and we went out at 7 o'clock in the morning to avoid the heat. That was well worth while because we soon realised that there were lots of native grasses, some really big patches of Wattle Matrush, lots of young plants of Cranberry Heath, and some lovely young native convolvulus plants. Just before we left someone found a clump of Autumn Grass Lilies *Tricoryn elatior* in early bud. These lilies are not really very common around here.

It is surprising what can be found when we really stop to look.

Jenni Collier has been out a number of times and the business meeting received a summary of the work she has done. Darren Bos has begun an online mapping service for this project. The aim is to update this regularly with information on what roadsides have been surveyed for threatened species. To view the web page go to www.mountalexander.vic.gov.au and follow the links through the environment section. Pathway (home - services

- environment - roadside conservation - threatened species project)

Rita Mills

Natural History, Outback

What a treat it was to have Trevor Blake (Australian Plant Society and illustrator for the Encyclopedia of Australian Plants) as our guest in November. Since "retiring" Trevor now works seven days a week exploring the "incredible balance, marvellous diversity and fascinating relationships that occur in this wonderful land of ours". His enthusiasm is infectious and his slides (showing two projections at a time) a visual feast!

Australia is one of the driest countries on earth. During the Jurassic times, the "lakes" we see in our Atlas would have been joined up by ancient riverbeds, and sediments were set down forming the Great Artesian Basin. A long period of warm temperatures followed and remnant vegetation of these times remain in the tropical north. In the Great Artisan Basin the water percolates through sand structures at a rate of 1 metre a year, but where a spring is not capped as at Dalhousie Springs today, the water table is being lowered all the time.

Between 5 and 2.5 million years ago Beech trees grew in Antarctica, the Murray basin was covered by the sea and Chenopods (saltbushes) developed. Variability developed. At the time of the last Ice Age (18-15 thousand years ago) sea levels were 130 metres lower and there were land bridges to Tasmania and New Guinea. The action of ice grinding over the surface of the land released the elements and minerals that are so essential to good soil. This occurred 18-15 thousand years ago and the last decent rejuvenation occurred 300,000 years ago. Our soils have become leached and degraded. But even so our desert is alive and thriving.

2/3 of the land was covered in dunes and 85% of land was treeless by the time white man arrived. The fire regime was catastrophic (settlers increased the use of fire compared with Aboriginal practices) and overgrazing caused long-term damage. The eco system was being destroyed and biodiversity decreased.

At this point Trevor began to show us his wonderful collection of slides. Some highlights were - a Hooded Robin, Spinifex Pigeons, Australian Bustards, Striated Grasswren, Wedge-tailed Eagles that are "in strife" because rabbit numbers have been depleted by the calici virus. For a while they were relying on road kills but now rabbit numbers are building again and eagle numbers increasing. There were Bush Stone-curlews "that sounded spooky when fifty or more are going full tilt at once", and a flock of countless thousands of Budgerigars (measuring 800m x 1km).

We also saw butterflies, a Hawk Moth, beetles and Bag Moth nests where "you don't shake the tree or the hairs that fall might cause you to scratch yourself to death!"

There were lizards including a Spiny Devil that will eat 10,000 ants a

day. Mammals included a Sandy Inland Mouse, and a Hopping Mouse that bounces up nearly 1m. A Stripe-faced Dunnart they nicknamed Jaws raided the food bins. Sometimes just the beautiful patterns of tracks in the sand told the story of the animals that had passed that way.

The plants included a variety of Eremophila, Grevillea and Acacia and also examples of Casuarina, Cassia, Lasiopatalum, Halgania, Saltbush, Calytrix and Ptilotis, and others I can't recall.

Then there were also many little gems from this man of the bush that showed his great respect for our Indigenous Australians. Thank you Trevor. (Edited. A full report is available if you are interested)

Geraldine Harris

Observations

• A visit to the Morgan's Track area off the Chewton-Fryerstown road recently revealed that the Diggers Speedwell plants which seemed completely dead, with no blooms to be seen at all last spring, had put out new growth and produced many delicate pale-blue flower heads this season. Shirley Parnaby

• Rita and Doug Mills walked along Morgan's Track on Sunday 9/11 and, just before the Speedwell spot, the Small-leaf Parrot-peas *Dillwynia phylicoides* in the gully opposite Evanmore Track were a mass of colour. The Grass Trigger-plants, which are normally beginning to fade by this time of year, were still in bud and didn't look like flowering for a couple more weeks. Best find for the afternoon? A small patch of White Everlastings *Chrysocephalum baxteri*, a locally significant plant. On 22/11 I walked along the Poverty Gully track and found the Grass Trigger plants beginning to flower, there's an excellent flowering of *Bursaria spinosa*, some Tiger Orchids, and lots of Blue Pincushions. Rita Mills

• Robyn van Smeerdijk has the Common Bird Orchids *Chiloglottis valida* under their peach tree in the usual spot and an Echidna and a Rufous Whistler in the garden.

• Helen and Chris Morris recently visited The Monk and were delighted by a wonderful blue haze of Chocolate Lilies. They also noted Bulbine Lilies, Billy Buttons, Blue Pincushions, Grevilleas, Spider Orchids and Everlastings as well as a pair of Chestnut Quail-thrush which crossed in front of them.

• Chocolate Lilies were also massed on Mount Tarrengower. Penny Garnett

• Hans van Gemert brought along two digital printouts: one of a lizard (identified as a Tree Dragon, or Jacky Lizard) that had visited the pond in their garden and taunted their elderly cat with various antics which included running on its hind legs. The other was of a Spotted Sun Orchid *Thelymitra ixiodes* which they had photographed at Chiltern.

• An Olive-backed Oriole has been calling in the garden for about three weeks. It is usually perched high in large eucalypts and so far no nest has been spotted. I am compiling a photographic record of the plants in our

been spotted. I am compiling a photographic record of the plants in our bush and this month has been especially rewarding with multiple Hooded Orchids *Stegostyla cullculata*, Pink Fingers *Petalochilus carnea* and Wax-lip Orchids *Glossodia major*, Purplish Beard Orchids *Calochilus robertsonii*, Golden Cowslips *Diuris behrii*, Slender Sun Orchids *Thelymitra pauciflora*, Scented Sun Orchids *Thelymitra megalyptra* and a single Spotted Sun Orchid. Others photographed but not positively identified - Tiny Caladenia, Ornate Caladenia, an albino Pink Fingers and a Diuris X. Spur Velleia, Sweet Bursaria and Blue Pincushions are also flowering. Geraldine Harris

• This year Richard Piesse has had his best ever display of Chocolate Lilies and Wax Lip Orchids since moving in three years ago. On Mt. Alexander he noted a number of interesting yellow (other than Capeweed and Broom) flowers including Bulbine Lilies, Wirilda *Acacia retinoides*, Sticky (Golden) Everlastings *Bracteantha viscosa*, Goodenia, and Common Wedge-peas *Gomphelobium huegelii*. Later he added Tiger Orchids *Diurus sulphurea*, found on the Helge track near his home, to his "yellow" list.

FROM THE BUSINESS MEETING 27/11/03

Ros Woodburn, Chairman of the **Heritage Park Advisory Group**, attended the meeting to give a brief outline of the role of the group. She hopes to give a short explanation of her work at the Dec. general meeting.

Jenni Collier provided a written **Project Update** on work done so far on the Threatened Species Roadside Survey and listed species and suggested target areas for the next 10-12 weeks. **Rita Mills** will be leading a **survey on Monday December 8** meeting at 118 Blakeley Rd at 7am or McManus Road, Barkers Creek, near the abridge at 7.05am.

Our proposal to fund an **annual prize** (with proceeds from "Is it a Native?" CD sales) to encourage students to get involved with the natural environment has been endorsed by the Castlemaine Secondary College. Commencing in 2004 an appropriate book and certificate will be donated each year **to a year 11 and a year 12 student** chosen by the school for their contribution and concern for the natural environment. This prize will be reviewed in 5 years time.

There is to be a **dawn breakfast** (and bird watching session) at Expedition Pass on **Saturday, January 10, at 6am**. Meet at the Pass and BYO everything. What a lovely way to start the years activities.

Kaweka Wildflower Reserve now **has a web site**. The address is -

Http:\\home.vicnet.net.au.\~kaweka

Articles Welcome - Articles, reports and observations can be left with Noellene at Tonks Bros., Barkers Street, Castlemaine or sent to P.O. Box 324, Castlemaine, 3450. Articles need to be submitted by the 4th Thursday of the month. Disclaimer - The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the Club.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme - December, 2003.

General meetings are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 8.00 pm on the second Friday of each month, except January.

Excursions are usually on the Saturday following the general meeting, and leave promptly at the times stated from The Octopus, opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

Business meetings are held at 27 Doveton Street on the 4th Thursday of each month, except December, at 7.30 pm. All members are invited to attend.

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB MEETINGS AND EXCURSIONS

Sat. Dec. 6. ***BOCA Bird Challenge.*** Leaders: Ken and Maureen Dredge. Meet at the Octopus opposite the Motel at 8.15am for an 8.30 start. Details CN305

Mon. Dec. 8 *McManus Rd. Survey* - see p 7 for details.

Fri. Dec. 12. ***Members and Visitors Night.*** Your chance to share a few slides a talk, a book review, some special observations from your travels etc. Newhaveners, especially - don't forget!! UCA hall. 8.30pm

Sat. Dec. 13 *Wombat Reservoir, south of Daylesford.* Details decided at the December meeting depending on weather etc. Leader R. Piesse

SAT. JAN 10. DAWN BREAKFAST AT EXPEDITION PASS RES. Meet at the Res. **at 6am.** BYO breakfast, binocs. Leader Margaret Badminton.

Fri. Feb. 13 *AGM* Election of Office bearers and Committee. Followed by *Local Geology* with Clive Willman. UCA hall, 8pm.

Sat. Feb. 14 *Addis Falls on the Coliban River, Taradale.* Leader Chris Morris. Leave the Octopus at 1.30pm sharp.

2003 Committee - C. Morris (President) ph. 9885 4221, J.Turnbull (VP and Grievance Officer) ph. 5474 3035, G. Broadway (Secretary) ph. 5472 2513, H. van Gemert (Treasurer) ph. 5472 1082, E. Perkins, R Mills (Newsletter Ed & Public Officer), G. Harris (Ass't Newsletter Editor), B. Maund, M. Oliver, R. Piesse and J. Cole.

Subscriptions for 2003

Ordinary membership: Single $22, Family $30

Pensioner or student: Single $19, Family $24

The subscription includes postage of the *Castlemaine Naturalist.*

The February meeting is the AGM. A nomination form is included in the CN this month. Please consider nominating someone you feel would be an asset to the committee, perhaps yourself?

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